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Regional and subregional inputs

Letter dated 6 February 2009 from the Permanent Representatives of Australia and Switzerland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Permanent Missions of Australia and Switzerland to the United Nations have the honour to transmit the enclosed letter from Bruno Oberle, Director of the Swiss Federal Office for the Environment, and John Talbot, General Manager of the Forestry Branch of the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, as well as the report attached thereto entitled "Australian-Swiss region-led initiative on regional input in support of the United Nations Forum on Forests" (see annex).

In the light of the importance of the report and its relevance to the work of the United Nations, in particular in the environmental field, we would appreciate it if the present letter and the report could be issued as an official document of the eighth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

(*Signed*) Robert **Hill**
Permanent Representative of Australia to the United Nations

(*Signed*) Peter **Maurer**
Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the United Nations

* E/CN.18/2009/1.

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Annex to the letter dated 6 February 2009 from the Permanent Representatives of Australia and Switzerland to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

Letter dated 2 February 2009 from Bruno Oberle, Director of the Federal Office for the Environment of Switzerland, and John Talbot, General Manager of the Forestry Branch of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry of Australia

We have the honour to inform you that a meeting was held under the Australian-Swiss region-led initiative on regional input in support of the United Nations Forum on Forests from 28 to 30 January 2008 in Geneva.

The specific objectives of the region-led initiative were as follows:

- To raise awareness at the regional and subregional levels concerning the international arrangement on forests and the role and work of the United Nations Forum on Forests, especially its mandate to strengthen interaction between the Forum and regional and subregional mechanisms, institutions, instruments, organizations and processes.
- To inform on the topics identified in the multi-year programme of work of the United Nations Forum on Forests with a view to sharing regional and subregional perspectives on those topics with the Forum.
- To examine opportunities for and constraints to integrating the planned Forum agenda items into meetings of the regional and subregional processes.
- To identify practical mechanisms and timelines for ensuring that the outputs from regional meetings are submitted to the Forum secretariat and integrated into the Forum sessions, as appropriate, and likewise for enhancing outputs from the global level at the regional level.
- To encourage inputs from forest-related regional and subregional mechanisms, institutions, instruments, organizations and processes to the United Nations Forum on Forests, by sending written focused contributions and/or participating in the sessions of the Forum.

The meeting of the region-led initiative was attended by 49 participants from 31 organizations and countries. Participation was on the basis of invitations to forest-related regional and subregional organizations, members of the Bureau of the eighth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests, members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and selected country experts.

The final report (see enclosure) captures the highlights of the deliberations during the Australian-Swiss region-led initiative on regional input in support of the United Nations Forum on Forests. It will be an important input to the work of the Forum at its eighth session, in April 2009.

We should be grateful if the final report could be issued as an official document of the eighth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests.

(*Signed*) John **Talbot**
General Manager
Forestry Branch
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

(*Signed*) Bruno **Oberle**
Director
Federal Office for the Environment

Enclosure

Report of the Australian-Swiss region-led initiative on regional input in support of the United Nations Forum on Forests, Geneva, 28-30 January 2008

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The region-led initiative

1. The region-led initiative, co-hosted by the Governments of Australia and Switzerland, was held in Geneva from 28 to 30 January 2008. It was attended by 49 participants from 31 organizations and countries. Participation was on the basis of invitations to forest-related regional and subregional organizations, members of the Bureau of the eighth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests, members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and selected country experts.

2. The region-led initiative was co-chaired by Sibylle Vermont and Macarthy Oyebo. Two working groups (co-chairs Tony Bartlett and Carlos Aragon and rapporteurs Jerilyn Levi and Abdellah Benmellouk) discussed the following issues drawn from a background paper prepared for the meeting:

- Ways to enhance the integration of topics and matters before the United Nations Forum on Forests into regional meetings.
- Key priorities and challenges of regional bodies and how these link to the topics of the Forum sessions, including any other topic that would need to be added.
- Capacity to influence future deliberations of the Forum (emerging issues, two-way process). What kind of outcome, decision or document from the Forum could contribute to improving sustainable forest management at the regional level.
- Modalities for providing regional input to the Forum (what type of support is required to hold regional meetings to deal with Forum agenda items and for reporting mechanisms to collect and organize input to the Forum?).

3. Discussions at the region-led initiative focused primarily on enhancing contributions of regional and subregional organizations to the Forum, but participants recognized the important role of regional and subregional organizations in facilitating implementation of action at the country level. The issue of country-level actions was not addressed specifically at the region-led initiative, since it was linked to other elements, such as means of implementation, which were to be addressed at the eighth session of the Forum.

Objectives of the region-led initiative

- To raise awareness at the regional and subregional levels concerning the international arrangement on forests and the role and work of the United Nations Forum on Forests, especially its mandate to strengthen interaction between the Forum and regional and subregional mechanisms, institutions, instruments, organizations and processes.
- To inform on the topics identified in the Forum multi-year programme of work with a view to sharing regional and subregional perspectives on these topics with the Forum.
- To examine opportunities for and constraints to integrating the planned Forum agenda items into meetings of the regional and subregional processes.
- To identify practical mechanisms and timelines for ensuring that the outputs from meetings of regional and subregional organizations are submitted to the

Forum secretariat and integrated into the Forum sessions, as appropriate, and likewise for enhancing outputs from the global level at the regional level.

- To encourage inputs from forest-related regional and subregional mechanisms, institutions, instruments, organizations and processes to the Forum, by sending written focused contributions and/or participating in the sessions of the Forum.

Introduction

4. The purpose of the region-led initiative was to promote, stimulate and enhance the contributions and participation of regional and subregional forest-related mechanisms, institutions, instruments, organizations and processes (hereafter referred to as regional and subregional organizations) in the work of the United Nations Forum on Forests, with a view to contributing to enhanced implementation of sustainable forest management. This was in response to States members of the Forum agreeing that there should be a greater interaction between the Forum and the work being carried out by forest-related organizations and processes that operate at the regional and subregional level.

5. Regional and subregional organizations have been invited by the Forum in its resolution 7/1 to address issues and agenda items planned for each Forum session, to provide a concise summary of their deliberations to the Forum secretariat and to contribute to the discussions of Forum sessions.

Background

6. The latter half of the twentieth century saw a marked decline in global forest cover as well as widespread forest degradation. The two ad hoc bodies of the United Nations established to address the problems — the Intergovernmental Panel on Forests and the Intergovernmental Forum on Forests — produced a wide range of proposals for action. However, only limited progress resulted on the ground and the problem continued. In 2000, the Economic and Social Council, by its resolution 2000/35, decided that the main objective of the international arrangement on forests was to promote the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forest and strengthen long-term political commitment to that end. In order to achieve the objective and carry out the functions of the international arrangement on forests, the Council established the United Nations Forum on Forests as an intergovernmental body of the Council.

7. Although the establishment of the international arrangement on forests showed new promise for implementing sustainable forest management, the early years of the United Nations Forum on Forests saw global policy dialogue continuing to focus on the same issues without facilitating greater implementation of sustainable forest management. It became clear that a significant strengthening and improvement of the international arrangement on forests was necessary to make it more effective at mobilizing political commitment to sustainable forest management and facilitating action on the ground.

8. In 2006 the international arrangement on forests was strengthened through a new Economic and Social Council resolution, resolution 2006/49, with a new, focused approach to implementing internationally agreed actions aimed at

sustainable forest management. It included four shared global objectives on forests and three new principal functions for the Forum, including one on regional and global interaction. At the seventh session of the Forum, member States reached agreement on the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests and the new multi-year programme of work. In December 2007, 15 years after the adoption of the Non-legally Binding Authoritative Statement of Principles for a Global Consensus on Management, Conservation and Sustainable Development of All Types of Forest (Forest Principles)[1] at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and subsequent discussions on a global approach to protect the world's forests, the United Nations General Assembly adopted this landmark instrument (resolution 62/98, annex). This was the culmination of nearly three years of intense negotiation.

Key priorities and challenges of the regional and subregional organizations

9. The region-led initiative provided an opportunity to share priorities and challenges faced by regional and subregional organizations, looking not only at ways to strengthen interactions with the Forum, but also in implementing sustainable forest management generally. It was clear that while many of these priorities and challenges were commonly shared, the individual nature of forests and the specific economic circumstances and political will of countries within each regional and subregional organization strongly influenced the priorities and operating modalities of each organization.

10. Most regional and subregional organizations already include issues from the Forum's multi-year programme of work on their agendas. However, there may be other discussions on topics associated with thematic issues of the Forum and the timing of these discussions varies.

Key priorities

11. While there was common agreement on the key global forest priorities, the timing and the ways of addressing those priorities were strongly dependent on the needs and capabilities of each region or subregion.

12. The following issues were identified as areas of priority for regional and subregional organizations that were also of priority at the global and national levels (not all of the priorities identified were priorities for every region or subregion, but many were common across organizations):

- Implementation of sustainable forest management
- Capacity-building and information exchange
- Mobilization of all types of financing
- Forests and climate change
- Biofuels and bioenergy

[1] *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 3-14 June 1992*, vol. I, *Resolutions Adopted by the Conference* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.93.I.8 and corrigendum), resolution 1, annex III.

- Biodiversity conservation and protection
- Water and forests
- Combating illegal and unsustainable logging
- Establishing partnerships among all stakeholders: strengthening multisectoral linkages and engagement
- Use and access rights to the forests for local communities
- Trade in forest products and market reforms
- Forest policy and institutional reform
- Protected area management
- Forests and health
- Forest degradation
- Deforestation
- Forests and poverty eradication

Challenges faced in implementation of sustainable forest management

13. The views presented below were expressed by regional and subregional organizations.

14. For implementation at the national, regional and global levels of forest-related commitments, in particular those related to the achievement of the four global objectives on forests:

- Translating high-level policy into action is challenging. It is essential to promote understanding of the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests and multi-year programme of work to facilitate action at the national level.
- National needs should determine the priorities of regional and subregional organizations and global forums.
- Political will is important to move implementation forward.

15. While most regional and subregional organizations are aware of the multi-year programme of work and the work of the United Nations Forum on Forests, some regional organizations are underinformed of the role and purpose of the Forum.

16. Means of implementation were highlighted as a necessary condition for implementing sustainable forest management, in particular at the national level. Some expressed the need to provide financial resources, transfer of environmentally sound technology, capacity-building, education, research, governance and law enforcement and to explore the potential of a funding mechanism. In that regard:

- Mobilization of resources at all levels and international cooperation, including official development assistance, was considered important.
- Mobilization of national resources was considered important for the establishment of national financing strategies for sustainable forest management. All types of financing options should be explored at the national and international levels for funding sustainable forest management.

17. Regions are diverse — economically, socially and environmentally — which influences discussions of specific regional and subregional organizations.

18. There is a clear need to get forestry issues onto the broader global and national development agendas and to integrate forests into national development plans and strategies. In that regard:

- There is a need to further raise the profile of forestry issues within the United Nations system.
- Better coordination between national focal points on forest-related issues and between decision makers outside the forest sector needs greater attention.

Integration of priorities at all levels

19. Forest-related issues are discussed at global, regional and national levels, often by a number of organizations or forums at each level and often with different focal points or country representatives at each discussion. To avoid duplication and possible conflicting outcomes there is a clear need for better communication, coordination and integration across the global, regional and national levels.

20. Many regional and subregional organizations have already taken steps and made great advances in integrating and coordinating efforts aimed at achieving sustainable forest management. These organizations can provide models to build on and adapt for other regional and subregional organizations. There will never be a "one size fits all" approach, but experience sharing and information exchange between organizations can result in less duplication of efforts and better outcomes at all levels.

21. The views presented below were expressed by regional and subregional organizations.

22. Regional and subregional organizations could consider Forum topics as appropriate, with a view to providing input to the Forum and facilitating the global dialogue.

23. Regional and subregional organizations can raise awareness of Forum outcomes. For example, workshops could be held at the regional level to increase awareness in sustainable forest management policy development and implementation.

24. Information exchange between regional and subregional organizations is beneficial to share experiences and lessons learned.

25. Regional and subregional organizations can play a role in facilitating cross-sectoral information sharing and integrating forest policy into other related policies.

26. Regional topics could be explored jointly at events such as the "forestry weeks" proposed in Asia and the Pacific and Europe and the Puembo initiative, and at meetings of the Central American Commission on Environment and Development, the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization, the Latin American and Caribbean Forestry Commission, the Near East Forestry Commission and African Forestry and Wildlife Commission (joint meeting) and the Central African Forests Commission (COMIFAC), all to be held in 2008.

27. Contact points from regional and subregional organizations could facilitate communication and better links with the Forum secretariat.

28. The member organizations of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests could make their national and regional focal points known to assist in coordination and communication at the regional and subregional levels. A meeting of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests in February 2008 will look at better cooperation and coordination on a number of key forest issues.

Emerging issues

29. A number of issues that were identified as key priorities for regional and subregional organizations were also discussed as potential emerging issues for future sessions of the United Nations Forum on Forests. These included bioenergy and land use change, water and forests and environmental services for mobilization of additional financial resources. The Bureau of the Forum will consider, in consultation with member States, the Collaborative Partnership on Forests and other stakeholders, any emerging issues for each session of the Forum as stated in section D of the multi-year programme of work of the Forum.

Interaction between the regional and subregional organizations and the United Nations Forum on Forests

30. There is a history of interaction between many regional and subregional organizations and the Forum, but there is also a common agreement that this interaction can be strengthened from both sides and in both directions. There is a strong interest from both the Forum and from regional and subregional organizations to explore steps and actions to achieve this. The region-led initiative provided a useful opportunity for regional and subregional organizations to learn more about the Forum and how it operates, as well as about activities in other regions. Using past experiences and lessons learned, a number of ways were identified to improve interaction between regional and subregional organizations and the Forum.

31. The United Nations Forum on Forests is an intergovernmental body and the participants in the Forum are the official representatives of member States, representing the views and the policies of each one of their respective Governments. Regional and subregional organizations are composed of diverse participants, with a wider range and larger number of forest practitioners and stakeholders present at the regional meetings than at global policy meetings. The composition of participants at the regional meetings compared with the global meetings creates a different dynamic for discussions. It is important to use this first cycle of regional and global meetings and interaction as a learning experience towards promoting greater exchange between the regional and global levels.

How can the United Nations Forum on Forests help the regional and subregional organizations?

32. The views presented below were expressed by regional and subregional organizations.

33. Exchange of information among regional and subregional organizations and knowledge sharing are important issues for capacity-building. In that regard:

- Most regional and subregional organizations have their own information sharing networks but there is no overall global library of information related to regional and subregional organizations.
- The Forum Secretariat could disseminate information and data from relevant regional and subregional organizations through the Forum website, and provide links to their respective sites to facilitate communication and coordination between these entities. For subregional cooperation, the Forum secretariat could offer support by sharing information and contacts.
- The development of an events calendar of planned activities that could be made available on the Forum website could be useful in providing deadlines for submissions and inputs into upcoming Forum sessions (as outlined in the reporting section below).

34. Bringing new activities into the regional sustainable forest management agenda may require additional funding. The Collaborative Partnership on Forests could be asked to consider providing additional support to regional and subregional organizations for better synergies and coordination.

35. There is a need to support national focal points and strengthen capacity-building to enhance communication and harmonization at all levels. This support could be enhanced through coordinated approaches with the Collaborative Partnership on Forests.

36. There is a need to devote one or two days in sessions of the United Nations Forum on Forests to discussions on regional and subregional dimensions to allow regional and subregional organizations to present their perspectives and information and to share experiences and best practices.

37. The member States of the Forum could organize and support events such as the region-led initiative and side events at other forums to enhance the knowledge and awareness of organizations on the work of the Forum.

How can the regional and subregional organizations help the United Nations Forum on Forests?

38. The views presented below were expressed by regional and subregional organizations.

39. Regional and subregional organizations are aware of the multi-year programme of work and the work of the United Nations Forum on Forests. Most themes and sub-themes are on the agenda of these institutions, and some of them have integrated programmes of work that include themes adopted by the Forum. However, the awareness of how the Forum secretariat and Collaborative Partnership on Forests members work, as well as knowledge of international forest policy decisions, varies at the regional level and could be enhanced through further interaction with the Forum secretariat.

40. Reports from regional and subregional organizations may help to complement national reporting, as few Forum member States submit voluntary country reports. Examples include the report on the *State of Europe's Forests 2007*, prepared jointly

by the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and the COMIFAC report on progress in sustainable forest management implementation.

41. Regional and subregional organizations could organize activities related to the International Year of Forests to raise public awareness and engage political and public interest in sustainable forest management.

42. Regional and subregional organizations could promote implementation of action towards sustainable forest management at the ground level in member countries, in accordance with their mandates.

43. Regional and subregional organizations could use their technical expertise and experience to contribute to deliberations at Forum sessions.

44. Regional and subregional organizations could provide the Forum secretariat with a timetable and schedule of meetings each year for inclusion on the Forum website.

45. Regional and subregional organizations could undertake collaborative programmes and organize workshops, seminars and side events in conjunction with Forum sessions to share information, seek advice and explore ideas. In that regard:

- Participation in the multi-stakeholder dialogue held as part of the Forum sessions could provide an opportunity for regional and subregional organizations to benefit from the experiences of a range of stakeholders and as a platform to create synergies among all stakeholders.
- Organizing regional and subregional events during Forum sessions could provide an opportunity to transmit regional experiences to other regions.

46. Regional and subregional organizations could provide regular feedback to the Forum on policy development, lessons learned and regional priorities. This input would inform Forum discussions in a manner that could be practical and useful to regional and subregional organizations.

Modalities for input from regional and subregional organizations

47. The views presented below were expressed by regional and subregional organizations.

48. Each region and subregion has a number of regional and subregional processes which result in a variety of methodologies and approaches. One size does not fit all and modalities will vary to best suit each organization. In that regard:

- Each organization has its own mandate, intergovernmental process and priorities which will determine its ability to interact with the Forum.

49. There are valuable experiences from all the regional and subregional organizations that can be used as models or for lessons learned for other regional and subregional organizations. The Forum secretariat could, through its website, share information on regional and subregional organizations and provide links to successful models or examples of interaction and input by regional and subregional organizations into the Forum.

50. Different regional and subregional organizations may need different methods of interaction with the Forum. In that regard:

- An option may be to ask regional and subregional organizations to discuss progress on the global objectives on forests that are relevant to their work.

51. Having regional and subregional preparatory meetings of regional and subregional organizations before Forum sessions could be considered as appropriate and helpful. As an example, the sustainable forest management project I/II put together a technical support team to bring African delegates together prior to the sixth and seventh sessions of the Forum to help African member States contribute to those sessions.

52. Timing is important. Intersessional work should support global meetings, with member States able to discuss issues and ideas at regional and subregional levels in time to provide input into the Forum sessions and to promote closer interaction between regional and subregional organizations and the Forum secretariat.

53. The United Nations Forum on Forests can play a key role in supporting countries in gaining political support for implementing sustainable forest management at the national, regional and global levels.

54. Time should be allocated in Forum sessions specifically for focused discussions related to regional and subregional organizations. This could include interactive panels, which are proposed for the Forum's eighth session.

Reporting

55. Regional and subregional organizations were invited under the multi-year programme of work of the Forum (resolution 7/1, annex, paras. 7 and 8) to address issues and agenda items planned for each session, to provide a concise summary of their deliberations to the Forum secretariat and to contribute to the discussions at Forum sessions.

56. The views presented below were expressed by regional and subregional organizations.

57. There is a need to avoid creating new reporting systems, and utilize existing processes to avoid creating a burden on member States, regional and subregional organizations and the Forum secretariat. In that regard:

- Many participants emphasized the need to avoid overlap and duplication for organizations that have their own programme for reporting to specific Governments and organizations (for example under conventions and to FAO). The Collaborative Partnership on Forests should continue enhancing coordination and cooperation with the forest-related conventions and relevant intergovernmental organizations to get the required information on actions, plans, programmes and measures.

58. FAO expertise, experience and reporting tools such as the Global Forest Resources Assessment and the State of the World's Forests report could be used by the Forum for reporting.

59. Assistance from the Forum may be useful and the development of guidance on reporting to the Forum was suggested by some participants. In that regard:

- A clear timeline showing reporting deadlines for input into Forum sessions could also be developed by the Forum secretariat and made available.

60. The need to strengthen and streamline reporting mechanisms on the state of forests in all regional and subregional organizations of the world was highlighted. FAO and other members of the Collaborative Partnership on Forests could take the lead in assisting regional and subregional organizations with technical assistance and capacity-building.

Conclusion

61. This region-led initiative provided an excellent opportunity to exchange information and ensure closer interaction at all levels.

62. The region-led initiative explored and highlighted several benefits from enhanced regional interaction.

63. Participants voiced their interest in working together to make progress on sustainable forest management globally.

64. Participants expressed their gratitude to the Governments of Australia and Switzerland for organizing the region-led initiative and encouraged other countries and regional and subregional organizations to organize future such initiatives.